

Another gold rush in California

By Roger Boye

Rare coins owned by Buddy Ebsen and other collectors fetched \$10.3 million in a California auction last month, far surpassing some pre-sale estimates.

"It was an exciting, unbelievable auction with lots of heavy bidding," said Lawrence Goldberg, an owner of Superior Stamp & Coin Co. of Beverly Hills, Calif., which conducted the sale. "We had huge advertising, the Buddy Ebsen name and quality coins."

The top rarity—an 1879 U.S. \$4 gold piece owned by Ebsen—went for \$165,000 in active bidding. The buyer told a Numismatic News reporter that he paid more than he expected.

"I didn't intend to go that much. I almost wish someone would have topped my last bid," he said.

Other high prices included \$108,350 paid for a \$50 "California gold coin" dated 1855 and \$99,000 for a \$3 gold piece from 1875. In all, about 60 keepsakes brought winning bids of \$20,000 or more (prices include a 10 percent sales commission).

Ebsen, who played the star detective on "Barnaby Jones" and Jed Clampett on "Beverly Hillbillies," said he sold his collection of U.S. and foreign coins because "it's time to do other things, such as travel."

• Uncle Sam has received orders for at least a half-million proof sets during the first six weeks of sales, officials report.

Each 1987 set costs \$11—the same price charged since 1981—and contains five coins housed in a hard-plastic case. The government produces proofs in San Francisco using specially prepared slugs and dies to create coins with mirrorlike finishes free of blemishes.

Collectors who want to buy proof sets but didn't receive a government order form in the mail last month should send a check made payable to the "United States Mint" to the mint at P.O. Box 13679, Philadelphia, Pa. 19162-0016.

Later this summer, officials will consign 1987 proof sets to financial institutions and retailers for over-the-counter sales. That action may help to generate new interest in coin collecting.